

A Case for Meatless Mondays

Reducing Meat Consumption in a Time of Climate Crisis.

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Q: How do you know if someone is a vegetarian?

A: They'll tell you!

Ask someone if they've considered vegetarianism and you'll often be hit with a barrage of disgust. *Me? Vegetarian? As if!* Images of tofu-munching, iron-deficient animal activists spring to mind. Cut meat out of your diet and you might as well dye your hair blue (organic hair dye, of course) and move to an off-grid location in the Scottish Highlands.

The negative perception of vegetarians has long clouded the public's vision surrounding one of the simplest ways to limit your carbon footprint. Study after study highlights the hugely destructive effect the meat industry is having on the planet. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, meat and dairy are responsible for about 14.5% of global greenhouse emissions, and with total meat consumption projected to reach 47.9 million tonnes over the next decade (that's a sixth of the weight of humanity!), we can only expect to see that number rise.

Although meat consumption in any shape or form isn't great for the planet, beef takes home the worst offender award, emitting more than double the amount of carbon dioxide relative to any other meat. Eating a single serving of beef is the carbon equivalent of driving 80 km- that's about an hour on the motorway! On a winning streak, beef also receives the much coveted prize of 'No.1 Destroyer of the Amazon Rainforest' and is responsible for about 40% of deforestation globally. Impressive!

Truth be told, these statistics are terrifying. If we don't put a stop to our carnivorous tendencies soon, rapid global warming will be upon us faster than you can say 'beef bourguignon'. Intense heatwaves, severe floods, wildfires and droughts will ramp up in intensity, as changing climates threaten the way we have lived for centuries... And that's just for starters!

But what about my bacon butty?

Gary, 46, is worried about the impact a limited meat consumption might have on his long-term relationship with fast-food brand Greggs. The two have been going steady for about 30 years and a world without those beautiful, flaky sausage rolls is a very bland

one indeed. But Gary needn't worry! Firstly, because Greggs now offers an excellent vegan sausage roll and secondly, because limiting meat in your diet can be a perfectly acceptable alternative to not eating it at all.

A study carried out by climate researchers at Imperial College London showed that people were much more willing to reduce meat consumption than cut the food group out completely. Options such as eating meat three times a week were favoured over strict regimes like Veganuary (becoming vegan for the month of January). The best part? Reducing meat intake was shown to be a pretty effective way to cut your greenhouse gas emissions. Even the small act of not eating meat on Mondays (Meatless Mondays) was shown to save the carbon equivalent of two short haul flights a year.

Put simply, you can still enjoy meat as part of your diet- Greggs won't be going out of business any time soon. The key difference is that you might want to enjoy three bacon butties a week instead of seven. The planet (and the NHS) will thank you!

Death by nutrient deficiency

'But what about my protein?!' I hear you exclaim woefully. In a world where protein bars, protein shakes and protein-god-knows-what lurk around every corner, it's hard to escape nutritional worries. Admittedly, meat is an important source of protein in our diet. It also arms us with iron, zinc and B vitamins- all essential for healthy living.

Fortunately, the wondrous invention of supplements allows vegetarians and vegans around the world to easily consume the nutrients they need to survive. A tablet a day keeps the doctor away! Fortified foods are also a lifesaver, pumping extra nutritional value into household essentials like bread, milk and margarine. Scan any supermarket shelf and you'll find cereals enriched with B12 and yoghurts choc-a-bloc with protein. To quote Matisse, there are cathedrals everywhere for those with eyes to see them. Really puts a poetic spin on your cornflakes, doesn't it?

Not my problem!

Octogenarian Linda can't quite bring herself to care about climate change. She's decided she'll be long gone before the real danger sets in and, following a heated Bingo argument last week, she's not in the mood to worry about her kids and grandkids. What Linda hasn't realised is that reduced meat intake will also benefit her health, potentially lowering her cancer risk, blood pressure and cholesterol. Rookie mistake!

Red, fatty and processed meats have all been linked to health problems. Research carried out at the USA's National Cancer Institute shows that consumption of red and processed meats is linked with increased bowel cancer risk. The institute has also

found that cooking meat using fire and smoke produces the same chemicals found in cigarette smoke and car exhaust fumes. Talk about gourmet dining...

The take-home message here is that, even if you can't bring yourself to care for the planet, at least try to take care of yourself. Eating less meat is great for your health- you can consider the whole climate change issue as an added bonus!

Case closed

The numbers don't lie; consuming meat regularly is terrible for the planet and your health. If cutting meat out completely seems too difficult, then don't be ashamed to start small. What about Meatless Mondays, just one day a week? It's a small but effective act in fighting global warming. And who knows? The tofu-munching life might suit you after all.